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**Abstract:** This article argues that Fernando Solanas's documentary production in the wake of the 2001 Argentine institutional crisis (especially his 2004 film *Social Genocide*) should not be straightforwardly assimilated to his 1960s film *The Hour of the Furnaces*, nor to the project of Third Cinema as it was fostered by Solanas and Getino's theorization of the relation between cinematic practice and national liberation. The argumentation points out a series of differences in the rhetorical structure of the films and in the political proposals at stake, to focus on the most important difference: the way each film relates and constructs a historical sequence. This methodological transformation in the narration of history accounts for a radically different conceptualization of agency and the role of the subject, which conflicts with recent statements on the "return of the political" to Latin America.

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## Historical Stasis:

### Solanas and the Restoration of Political Film after the 2001 Argentine crisis

The events that took place in Buenos Aires in December 2001 have had an impact that exceeds the limits of Argentine institutional history. The middle class protests, resulting in the resignation of the president who had been elected two years before, the appointment in just ten days of three other heads of state who were subsequently removed or resigned, the economic crisis, the brutal police repression that left over forty casualties —these events were to be insistently read as one of the first indications of the return of the political to the region. This renewed prominence of the political became apparent in the next few years with the election of administrations that ground their discourses in an anti-neoliberal and left-leaning rhetoric. Jesús Martín Barbero explained the novelty of this situation as “the return of politics to the fore after almost twenty years of suffering the perversion of seeing economics as the one and undisputed protagonist” (2006: 6)<sup>i</sup>. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri interpreted the 2001 uprisings as a sign of the “failure of the model” (2004: 174) and read the emergence of new social actors such as *piqueteros* and movements of unemployed and industrial workers as an “expression of the multitude capable of engaging the entire realm of social labor” (2004: 137). It was even suggested as late as 2007 that this was a turning point in history, whose effects are not yet apparent: “The 2001-2002 economic crisis may have been a watershed moment that transformed the working conditions of the Argentine political system, without this transformation being visible yet” (Verón 2007)

The civil uprisings of December 2001 also provided the impulse for Fernando Solanas's return to political documentary, after decades dedicated to the practice of fictional film. Once the theorist of Third Cinema and the author of its classic, *La hora de los hornos / The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas & Getino, 1968), in his films from the 1970s through the 1990s, Solanas explored other forms of political praxis –just as he did in his personal life: he led a political party, was elected as a representative, and even ran for president. Solanas himself explained this return to his origins in the statement of purpose for the new film: "The tragedy of De la Rúa's fall inspired me to return to my beginnings in film making, when the search for a political and cinematic identity and the resistance to dictatorship drove me to making *The Hour of the Furnaces*" ("Nota"). The result was *Memoria del saqueo / Social Genocide* (Solanas, 2004), a two-hour documentary that not only narrates and displays the 2001 events in the streets of Buenos Aires from the standpoint of the direct witness, but also, and most importantly, tries to explain them from the standpoint of the historian. *Social Genocide* is actually the first in a series of documentaries shot by Solanas in an effort to create a fresco of contemporary Argentina<sup>ii</sup>. Such a plan – i.e., offering a totalizing representation of recent Argentine history– already suggests a change in the way Solanas conceives of historical agency and / or political praxis, a new way that precludes, as we will explain, the possibility of the celebrated return of the political.

The association between *Social Genocide* and Solanas's own 1968 landmark *The Hour of the Furnaces* was not only a strategy to authorize the new film, but also an opportunity to revisit the conceptual, cinematic, and political proposal originally presented in the manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," written by Solanas and Getino, co-directors of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, that is, a cinema "independent in production, militant in politics, and experimental in language" (Stam 1990: 253)<sup>iii</sup>. The reviews of *Social Genocide* collected in Solanas's web page –signed by public figures spanning from Gillo Pontecorvo to Hebe de Bonafini-- agree when pointing out how *Social Genocide* "reinstates Solanas in the genre he invented" (De la Fuente & Quintín 2004: 5), and most readings claim that the new film was

designed as "a continuation of the classic from the 1960s" (Batlle); as a restoration of *The Hour of the Furnaces*'s proposal, "in which the [new] film addresses politics as if the conditions of political practice had not been transformed during the 90s". (Aguilar 2006: 136)

The purpose of this essay is to call attention to three misunderstandings that these two "returns" have created: first, that the recent political prominence of those who participated in radical militancy in the 1960s and 1970s signals the triumphal reemergence today of the political projects of that time, and the celebrated return of the political; second, that *Social Genocide* is a sequel of *The Hour of the Furnaces* and a restoration of "political cinema" to its fundamental place in culture; third, that those two processes can be described as if they were two parts of the same phenomenon, and explained by the same logic. We will demonstrate that the difference between the two films resides in the irreconcilability of their political and aesthetic concerns, and propose that such a conflict plays a crucial role in the analysis of current political and cultural discourses in Argentina. Our focus is the way each film constructs a "historical sequence" to narrate "real events", for it is in the process of telling history that each film exposes its different concept of "present". In order to do so, we will briefly describe each film's proposal; explain why we argue that reading one film as the sequel to the other is misleading, before finally turning to what we believe are the consequences of this argument. A note on terminology: although most works on the aftermaths of 2001 refer interchangeably to the "return of the political" and to the "return of politics", we prefer the former. We believe that the "return of the political" best describes the phenomenon that emerged after the crisis; a phenomenon less related to the restoration of institutional mechanisms than to the resurgence of the antagonist dimension constitutive of social identity. As Chantal Mouffe puts it, "The political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition". (1993: 3)

**I- Registering the crisis, archiving the 1960s:  
from *The Hour of the Furnaces* to *Social Genocide***

The many similarities between *The Hour of the Furnaces* and *Social Genocide* certainly invite a reading of the films as a continuum. Both films exhibit a narrative structure that relies significantly upon the exposition of historical discourse in a diachronic fashion. This is not only an analytical tool for the examination of reality, but mainly a didactic resource whose aim is to reinforce the propositional content of the narrative. *The Hour of the Furnaces* deploys an account of Latin American history that spans from colonial times to the immediate past –to the point of referring to the death of Che Guevara, which occurred only a few months before the film's release in 1968. The film proposes that history is the intellectual basis for the understanding of Latin America and a source of authority for the analysis of the present. This might be the only sense in which *Social Genocide* can be conceived as a sequel of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, as it takes up the narration of Argentine history at the point where the previous film had stopped –although not exactly there, as we will discuss later-- and brings it, again, to a very recent point in the past (the film, released in 2004, incorporates Kirchner's appointment as president in 2003).

Perhaps the best example of a unitary reception of Solanas's documentaries is Guillermo Olivera's comparative analysis of *The Hour of the Furnaces* and *Social Genocide* from the standpoint of political theory. His article outlines the many similarities between these two cinematic projects, and thus reinforces the reading of both films as a diptych. The work clearly identifies the two domains in which the films coincide: "Lines of continuity can be established in the political argumentation and aesthetics of the documentary production of Fernando Solanas" (2008: 247). Regarding political

argumentation, the coincidence resides for Olivera in the persistence of the simplest version of dependency theory (i.e., "externalist and mechanistic", 2008: 251) as the basis for Solanas's interpretation of Latin American history. Olivera describes how "Solanas's documentary discourse" stages a reversal of the binary oppositions stated by modernization discourse, but still operates with the same logic. On the other hand, the aesthetic coincidence that allows him to refer to "Solanas's documentaries" as a whole, non-conflictive system, is a filmic rhetoric consisting of "extreme visual and contrapuntal contrasts" (2008: 256): the poor vs. the rich, the countryside vs. the capital, high angle vs. low angle shots. This series of oppositions informs an allegorical representation of the "fundamental and structuring antagonism [...] that of «the nation-people» vs. «the System»" (2008: 257). Dependency theory and the aesthetics of contrast are therefore the intellectual and rhetorical marks of the film's loss of "political efficacy in the struggle for hegemony" (2008: 258).

It is interesting to note that Olivera's approach does not link the "resurrection" of Solanas's interest in documentary to the resurrection of the Latin American Left, as stated by the contention of the return of the political. According to him: "Solanas produces documentaries when the representative link that ties the political representatives to the represented (the people) is suspended or breaks down, as experienced during the times of proscription of Peronism (1955-73) and in the more recent crisis of representation in Argentine institutional politics (1989-2001)" (2008: 247). This is certainly a valid point to make about the similarity in the conditions of production of the films –but it is also a deterministic, and subsequently, disempowering line of argumentation. On the one hand, there is more behind Solanas's decisions on the narrative and visual construction of Argentine history than the break of the natural liaison between the people and their representatives –even if this conflict has an important impact on the form of the representation. On the other hand, Solanas's use of dependency theory and contrastive analysis

in a simplistic fashion maybe should be read not as a naïve interpretation of history and politics, but as a key strategy in accordance with his conception of cinema as a social instrument.

We do not, however, wish to contest Olivera's discussion of the structure that ideologically supports the political argumentation in either *The Hour of the Furnaces* or *Social Genocide*, but the implication that this structure is the same in both films –an implication that underlies most readings of *Social Genocide*, as we mentioned above. We argue here that there is a significant difference between the way Solanas represented history and the present in the 1960s, when his practice as a filmmaker was intimately tied to a particular political program, and the way he represented history and the present in the wake of the 2001 conjuncture, when that former program had completely vanished. We claim that there is a radical difference in the way each film approaches the diachronic narration of events, and that these approaches entail very different ideological connotations, which are vital for reexamining the relationship between the 1960s and 1970s and the more recent political projects in the region.

*The Hour of the Furnaces* is structurally determined by the concept of "film act" [cine-acto, película- acto], proposed by Solanas and Getino as the best way to designate the final product of the practice of Third Cinema: the ultimate form of the film is not contained in its materiality, but emerges in the act of screening it for a group of people. It is in the process of showing, watching, and discussing the film that its inconclusive nature, its openness, are revealed. Just to mention the clearest example: on several occasions *The Hour of the Furnaces* presents a black screen, and the narrative voice-over invites an outside moderator to guide a discussion with the viewers. In these moments the projection is interrupted, while the "film act" takes place. *The Hour of the Furnaces* –and Third Cinema as a whole, according to this founding proposal- is explicitly designed to trigger the emergence of a particular, different event in each screening, so the disposition of the historical sequence must respond to this intention. Contrary to first impressions, the diachronic structure of *The Hour of the Furnaces* is not really consistent –only the chronicle of Peronism in the second part is organically sequential. During the rest of

the film, and in the film as a whole, viewers are only confronted with a nuclear, simplistic chronology that tends to repeat itself over and over again: colonization, colonial exploitation, underdevelopment, and the wish for liberation. The repetition of this straightforward sequence renders all parts of the film equally effective.

Chapter 1 ("La historia") in the first part of *The Hour of the Furnaces* is the best example of this logic. This short section (less than four minutes) offers a condensed version of the historical reasoning that supports the whole film. Even the very first phrase of the voice-over narration is in itself the perfect expression of *The Hour of the Furnaces's* fractal structure: "The independence of Latin American countries was betrayed in its origins". The paradox stated in the phrase suggests the use of history in the film as the evidence of a deceiving present, and the prominence of synchronicity over sequentiality. The narrative that follows didactically explains how "neocolonialism" works and was invented, how the formation of Latin American countries during the 19th century was a response to the necessities of a world system, and how that world system has been able to subsist with little variation into the 1960s at the expense of the victims of exploitation in the third world. This segment is visually constructed by cutting from colonial and 19th century drawings representing scenes of the independence wars in Latin America, primitive graphic advertisements for products imported to and from Great Britain, and even Queen Victoria's profile on a pound sterling note –all of these still pictures, sometimes dynamized by selective zoom–, to current footage of men playing golf, OEA sessions –with special focus on L. B. Johnson–, and the disembarking of US troops. The first part of this segment presents an apparent counterpoint of past (the drawings and ads) and present (the golfers), that becomes less apparent after the narrator brings the historical argumentation to a conclusion ("Neocolonialism was born") and the sound track incorporates the noises of a battle, and finally, Andean music. After this abrupt change, the images of past and present are less contrastive, representing similar actions and scenes: 19<sup>th</sup> century civil wars and naval battles alongside 20<sup>th</sup> century US military interventions, heads and bodies of political

enemies exhibited on poles vs. people stopped by armed soldiers on the streets, and people leaning against walls that exhibit anti-American graffiti. In this manner, past and present rapidly merge in the same visual image, as announced by the first phrase of the narration, and sequentiality is preempted by the notion of synchronicity in Latin American history.

Now, this portion of the film stages an extremely cohesive and convincing narrative, which takes the form of a classic chronological account of events, of a legitimate, organized and rigorous historical sequence. But this is only a narrative effect produced by the highly efficient manipulation of the disposition of image and narration to construct a particular version of history. As Willemsen, reading Walter Benjamin, suggests, the film is built upon "dialectical images" –monads in which past and present crystallize– that "stress the relations with the viewer as being the productive site of cinematic signification" (11). The documentary's fractal structure interrupts a classic chronological account of events and holds back a closure of the historical sequence, leaving the audience in charge of this closure and therefore conceiving of the present as a work-in-progress.

While in *The Hour of the Furnaces* the historical sequence remains open to include the present and thus relies on the spectator for comprehension and coherence, in *Social Genocide* the historical sequence is organized around a narrative of closure that engulfs past and present and turns them both into history. Contrary to *The Hour of the Furnaces*'s "free-floating argumentative" causality, *Social Genocide* is grounded upon chronological causality: the opening and closing scenes capture the 2001 civil uprisings; the central scenes consist of a flashback that depicts the historical facts that have made these uprisings -this return of the political- possible. As the title of the documentary in Spanish suggests, the central scenes correspond to a "memoria del saqueo", an account of the gradual dissipation of national economic resources that cannot but result in the awakening of popular political consciousness: the military regime and its links with multinational corporations and local elite interests, the democratic

1990s in which neo-liberal economic policies were reinforced and the corruption of institutions fortified, and the last administration that, despite the evident signs of popular dissatisfaction, followed a similar path. The central scenes outline a causal map that places military dictatorship at the origin of recent history, considers all post-dictatorial governments as its direct epilogue, and the 2001 uprisings as their culmination. Past events are rearranged in such a manner that they seem to develop chronologically into the present of the film, embedding it into the causal sequence and converting it into history.

The film's formal organization attests to this conversion and is thus of particular significance. Archival footage documenting national history is interspersed with white signs that provide the viewer with either dates or facts that follow a linear order. Instead of interrupting the narrative flow in a "slogan-like fashion" like in *The Hour of the Furnaces*, these white signs make the construction of a clear-cut chronological sequence possible. The outcome of this precise temporal assembly is, once again, the historical conversion of the present. This happens not only because the present opens and closes the sequence and hence anchors the sequence as a sequence, but also because it is formally engulfed *into* this linear sequence through at least three recurring editing strategies. First, interviews reflecting upon the historical process that were obviously shot after the uprisings intercut the chronology, accompany the archival footage, and are thus perceived as past analyses. In a similar fashion, there is a travelling camera that captures empty administrative buildings, alluding to the aftermaths of the upheaval. These "present" images are also dragged into the chronological sequence, as if the past were anticipating the upcoming 2001 scenery, as if "setting the stage" for its own culmination. Lastly, sounds reminiscent of the street protests gradually enter the chronology, blurring one more time the temporal boundaries and suggesting that the present has definitively penetrated the past. The effect of these three editing strategies is a careful juxtaposition that results in an amalgamation of

temporalities and in the subsequent historical conversion of the present. In other words, by formally immersing it into a sequence that is meant to be perceived as "historical", the film displays its "present" as history; as the outcome of a chronological process that had started more than two decades before. If the use of dialectical images was at the core of *The Hour of the Furnaces*'s programmatic impulse, as mentioned in our analysis of the film's fractal temporal assembly, we could say that *Social Genocide* has discarded those dialectical images that pointed directly to the viewer's consciousness and has embraced a "historicist" representation built upon a teleological causality that necessarily obliterates the metonymic articulation of temporalities – that instead of conceiving of past and present as indelibly intertwined and in constant change, considers the past (i.e., the 1960s and early 1970s) as a mere pre-history leading to the present, as a static antecedent.

In this totalizing representation, the years between 1976 (when the dictatorship took power) and 2001 bear the consistency of a complete –concluded– period: the uprisings mark the successful closure of the era that had begun in 1976, the closure of the neo-liberal epoch. If from the beginning of the post-dictatorial period, the political projects of the 1960s and 1970s Left have been read in terms of "defeat"; in his film Solanas shows the turning point where "defeat" developed into "victory". The reasoning underlying *Social Genocide* is the following: up to 2001 the military regime "has won the battle" owing to the continuation of its neo-liberal economic agenda; in 2001 history began to turn, and it was the 1960s and 1970s Left –embodied in the Argentine people and epitomized by the uprisings– who definitively triumphed. The film thus reaches an overarching conclusion: the agency for which *The Hour of the Furnaces* was claiming has finally emerged; the political has returned; history is over.

In his study of documentary film, Philip Rosen argues that the notion of documentary is grounded upon two interrelated semantic clusters: teaching or warning, and evidence or proof. It is this

second semantic cluster that best applies to *Social Genocide*. Even when being didactic, the film ultimately aims at documenting (i.e., proving, registering) the present and, in so doing, labelling it as a historical document. This documenting process not only reaches *Social Genocide*; it also works backwards, altering *The Hour of the Furnaces*. Previously conceived as an appeal to political action, in the wake of the new film *The Hour of the Furnaces* is deprived of its temporal urgency and transformed into archival material, a mere document torn apart from its previous historical constellation and placed within a new one that empties out its previous meaning. This mention of *The Hour of the Furnaces* by the narrator in the segment about children with malnutrition is indicative of both the "documentary" and the "prophetic" values assigned to it in the new film: "the levels of poverty denounced by the film *The Hour of the Furnaces* in the 1960s would be just the announcement of the neoliberal genocide of the 1990s." Such a move compromises all the political content of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, which is left only with its capacity to announce the future. By making *The Hour of the Furnaces* the text that had the capacity to foretell a future that we already know, *Social Genocide* not only erases its political calling, but also offers a static version of the 1960s and early 1970s as the site for the articulation of utopia at the level of expression alone. The contemporary rewriting of political documentary entails the rewriting of its programmatic edge: the documentary is no longer representing history as a means of interpellation, but representing history to write it as history. To put it in Rosen's words, Solanas is no longer a "historical agent" who cannot secure narrative ending and whose action remains open and unfulfilled, but a "historian" who knows past and present with absolute certainty and is therefore able to build an integral sequence<sup>iv</sup>. This individual metamorphosis – from "historical agent" to "historian" – implies a fundamental change in the films' narratives – from "non-closure" to "closure" –that brings both the recent past and the recent present to a temporal standstill. The 1960s and 1970s have turned into mere antecedents whose programmatic content has been polished; the 2001 uprisings are

presented as their culmination, their last stage; a matter of either celebration or contemplation but by no means a call for action.

Two temporal elisions attest to this move and entail further ideological connotations. As we mentioned before, 1976 is repeatedly seen as the starting point of the national tragedy. Before this year the narrative conceives of a "golden age" of workers' rights and an inclusive nation state. If this golden age could be easily identified with the years of enthusiastic Peronism (around 1950), the film prefers to situate it more vaguely, without further details, merely before 1976, in an indefinite past that includes even the historical conjuncture reflected in *The Hour of the Furnaces*. Such a proposal erases the prospective content of the 60s and early 70s in Latin America that was at the core of *The Hour of the Furnaces*: fostering revolution as the effective seizure of power through armed struggle. The allusion to this golden age and the erasure of the years leading to 1976 obliterate the meaning of both Third Cinema and its political context. They polish the "militant" edge of militant cinema and strengthen its "documentary" components, laying bare the necessary bond between these two sides of the "film act". Moreover, the narrative introduces another significant ellipsis in the account of Argentine history: the events between December 2001 and Kirchner's taking of office in 2003—years characterized by institutional turmoil, political unease and democratic uncertainty, as suggested by the number of heads of state over such a short period. If by omitting the late 1960s and early 1970s, the film avoids a reference to its programmatic content, by skipping the process of institutional crisis that followed the uprising, Solanas is able to represent the present as the immediate (and successful) outcome of popular upheaval and emphasize its closure. As opposed to *The Hour of the Furnaces*, in *Social Genocide* the present is not to be built but is already given; it is not a site for construction but a site for authorization. Both elisions —late 1960s/early 1970s, and the 2001-2003 period— entail a reassuring, even appeasing, effect. And this takes us back to the title in Spanish: if the term "memorias" [memoirs] entails a subjective reconstruction of the past (and, in most cases, a remembrance of the private life of the

individual engaged in the exercise of memory), the word "memoria" [account] –which Solanas chooses for his film– implies a narrative tied to official, even administrative, issues; it also resembles another word of the same family: "memorial", that is a text that acts as an official account of collective history. Moreover, if "memorias" points in Spanish to the coexistence of diverse perspectives (the multiple perspectives of only one person or a juxtaposition of perspectives of multiple persons), "memoria" involves a single point of view, which clings to only one version and is thus to be considered "objective"; it implies less a narrative-in-progress than an already closed and certified narration.

In contemporary Argentina, this particular "closure" of history has not only emerged in Solanas's documentary. A similar trend can actually be found in recent testimonial cinema, as David Blaustein's paradigmatic *Botín de Guerra / Spoils of War* (Blaustein, 1999) suggests. The documentary juxtaposes interviews with relatives of the disappeared and archival footage registering recent Argentine history. Here again *The Hour of the Furnaces* is included as archival material and thus torn apart from its previous historical constellation, deprived of its programmatic edge and transformed into a historical document. Released in 2000, the film does not obviously aim at "historicizing" the 2001 uprisings but certainly builds a temporal sequence that blurs the lines between past and present in an effort to destabilize the latter. Arguably, *Spoils of War* can be read as an early sign of the upcoming stasis of the 1960s and 1970s in political documentary; it can also be read as an index of the link between this static representation and the authorization of contemporary left-leaning cultural and political discourses. *Televisión por la identidad*—a television series supported by Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and by the Kirchner administration—offers a more recent example of this representational shift. Although the connection with the documentary narrative—and the use of archival material—is completely different, the series is grounded upon a similar mixing of temporalities and a similar static representation of the recent past. Like in *Social Genocide*, this particular narrative aims at legitimating and "closing" the present, ratifying its hegemonic discourse.

## II- The 1960s and 1970s after the "return of the political": an intellectual puzzle

We began our reflection stating that our main goal was to assess critically three misunderstandings: first, that the so-called return of the political in Latin America accounts for the return of the left-leaning political projects of the 1960s and 1970s; second, that the reemergence of political documentary should be read as the reemergence of canonical 1960s militant cinema; and, finally, that these two rebirths could be seen as two sides of the same phenomenon. A close reading of *The Hour of the Furnaces* and *Social Genocide* –arguably the two films that best represent both periods– helps to clarify this triple misunderstanding and calls for a new critical approach. An examination of the way both films construct their historical sequences not only points to their radical difference but also illuminates the ideological connotations that this difference entails. While in *The Hour of the Furnaces* a decentralized narrative appeals to the audience for agency and closure, organizing the present as a terrain for construction (almost as a work-in-progress), *Social Genocide* drags the present of the film into the historical sequence, creating it as a space that is already given, closed, a matter for celebration or contemplation only. This particular stasis works to some extent backwards, freezing also the political projects of the 1960s and 1970s, turning them into archival material, into a mere document of a new documentary that is already over.

It is worth asking now why these differences matter. Why would it be so crucial to highlight the discrepancies between these two returns? Our purpose is not to suggest that a "genuine," "proper"

restoration of older forms of political documentaries or political projects should take place –a suggestion that cannot but be regarded as anachronistic. By explaining this misreading we hope to underscore at least two features of political and cultural discourses today.

First, the analogy between the contemporary return of the political and the 1960s and 1970s political projects can be not only misleading but also quite dangerous. It runs the risk of setting the stage for a future backlash: if contemporary political projects vanish –and, at least in Argentina, there is evidence that this may happen soon– Latin American politics of the 1960s and 1970s, which have fallen under the category of “defeat” for three decades, might fall even deeper under this categorization. In other words, through their particular portrayal of the exhaustion of neo-liberalism, *Social Genocide* – and all the cultural and political discourses that follow this pattern– might also be contributing to a future portrayal of the exhaustion of the contemporary return of the political.

In this sense, Solanas’s film should be read as embodying a much larger narrative that encompasses both official discourses from Latin America and external views on Latin America–views that the documentaries themselves, much more influential abroad than at home, have helped to create. A brief overview of how the 2001 uprisings have been depicted globally suggests its scope. Naomi Klein’ and Avi Lewis’s *The Take*, for example, clings to a similar periodization in an attempt to represent the collapse of the neo-liberal model (“the model,” as referred to in the film) and the return of the political “bubbling from below”, embodied in the workers who have taken over the bankrupt factories after 2001. A good example of the reemergence of political documentary, the film’s historical sequence resembles that of *Social Genocide*: the present opens and closes the cycle; the central scenes compose a flashback built upon archival footage displaying the chronology that led to 2001. Although the space that both segments occupy inverts *Social Genocide*’s organization –“present scenes” take up most of Klein’ and Lewis’s documentary–the sequence builds a similar linear narrative: the “golden years” of

Peronism are superseded by the neo-liberal 1990s; the model collapses; the political returns. The use of temporalities is, nonetheless, quite different and allows for a reading of *The Take* as a more "militant" film. Scenes that "belong to the past" are clearly separated in archival footage. Scenes that "belong to the present," on the contrary, are intercut by decentralized lines of narrative that emerge without following a linear order –workers' *testimonios*, images of street protests, shots of expropriated factories, the electoral campaign, the constant threat of police repression; all these lines of narrative appear back and forth highlighting the non-closure of the sequence. As opposed to *Social Genocide*, *The Take's* formal organization creates two distinct time periods: a closed past dominated by neo-liberalism and a present-in-progress, under construction, "bubbling with politics" –in fact, the period of institutional uncertainty elided in *Social Genocide* is the main period reflected in *The Take*, probably in order to underline that the present is not already given but yet to be built. However, even when relying on an opposite view of the present, *The Take* joins *Social Genocide* in its portrayal of the exhaustion of neo-liberalism and the return of the political through a similar chronological narrative --a narrative grounded also upon a static representation of the revolutionary projects in Latin America. By the same token, as we mentioned above, Hardt and Negri put forward an optimistic evaluation of the 2001 crisis, holding on to a similar narrative. To put it simply, by depicting 2001 as a watershed dividing two self-contained and separate periods–the neo-liberal era; the return of the political–all these cultural and political discourses might be preparing the field for an undesirable repercussion: the failure of "the political" as it is understood today runs the risk of entailing the definitive burial of left-leaning political projects.

Second, by freezing the representation of both the 1960s and 1970s and the present of the film, *Social Genocide* –and all the cultural and political discourses that follow this pattern– might also be erasing the possibility of dissidence. Closing representation and obliterating its openness leads to a binary from which there seems to be no way out: either you adhere to this representation (the 1960s and 1970s as mere antecedents without programmatic content; as a mere pre-history of an era

definitively closed in 2001) or you are on the side of those responsible for the atrocities of the military dictatorship—and this polarization certainly pervades contemporary Argentine discourse, as the recent dispute between the “rural” sectors and the government shows.

Interestingly enough, Solanas himself ended up a “victim” of his own polarization when he decided to oppose the current administration, emphasized its differences with the left-leaning political projects of the 1960s and 1970s, and was accused of being a “right-wing intellectual.” In this sense, again, *Social Genocide* should be read as embodying a much larger narrative, which certainly includes official Argentine discourse today. This particular polarization –grounded, as we have seen, upon two interrelated static representations– points to an unresolved problem worth addressing: the impossibility for contemporary Latin American intellectuals to raise a dissident voice without contributing to the failure of left-leaning political projects. In other words, if current political projects are perceived as left-leaning political projects that resemble those of the past, and if this perception is based on a particular (static) conceptualization of the link between the 1960s and 1970s and the present, then how would it be possible to question this conceptualization without contributing to the “defeat” of the Left? The dilemma seems to allude to a deeper concern: how to design a new intellectual ethics that is not based upon counter-hegemony –when it is precisely the appeal to a counter-hegemonic position that has characterized Latin American intellectuals at least since the 1970s. The recent parliamentary elections in Argentina are, in fact, a clear example of this dilemma and demonstrate the uncomfortable position of those left-leaning intellectuals (like Solanas, who reached the second place as a member of the Parliament in the city of Buenos Aires and was thus elected as a representative) opposing the current administration and/or criticizing their political project.

In *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau analyzed how some political discourses could be considered “populist” because they articulated their hegemonic identity around the notion of the

"people" as an empty signifier. While *Social Genocide* undoubtedly registers this operation (in fact, the portrayal of the 2001 uprisings provides a visual example of the transition from "request" to "claim" that is constitutive of the category), it also documents the existence of another empty signifier that organizes contemporary discourse: the 1960s and 1970s<sup>v</sup>. Filling this empty signifier with meaning is a task that certainly remains open; a space for negotiation that could be the point of departure for designing a new intellectual ethics. Although, again, this takes us back to the previous dilemma: if, according to Laclau, empty signifiers are necessary to articulate a hegemonic identity, and if many political projects in the region have based their hegemonic identities upon the 1960s and 1970s as an empty signifier; then "filling this empty signifier with meaning" would eventually put in danger the possibility of a hegemony of the Left in the region. We could say that this is the real puzzle –and not the specificity of a particular political project– that lies behind the possibility of the return of the political to Latin America.

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<sup>i</sup> All translations from the Spanish are our own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>ii</sup> Although initially announced as a trilogy, four films have been released to date: *Memoria del saqueo* (2004), *La dignidad de los nadies* (2005), *Argentina latente* (2007), and *Próxima estación* (2008), all of them about the effects of neoliberal policies on the Argentine economy.

<sup>iii</sup> See also Chanan (1983); Downing (1986); Gabriel (1982); Guneratne & Dissanayake(2003); Pick (1978); Pines & Willemen (1989); Solanas & Getino (1969, 1973).

<sup>iv</sup> "For the historian's account is always produced from a point in time after the sequence is completed; otherwise the end of the sequence could not be securely identified and its integrity would therefore be in doubt. This historiography therefore assumes a disjunction in knowledge between actual historical agents and historians, and the possibility of a convincingly secure narrative ending is the site of this disjunction. [...] The historical agent would have to know his or her future with absolute certainty in order to construct a correct integral sequence." (Rosen 2001: 238)

<sup>v</sup> On the relation between empty signifiers and hegemony, see Laclau (2005), especially pp 68-77.